

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO STEP UP INVESTIGATIVE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

A restructuring of the Law Enforcement Division of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service was announced today by Director Lynn A. Greenwalt.

"The changes we've made will give us a harder hitting Federal force that will be able to deal more effectively with wildlife violations," Greenwalt said.

"Because of additional responsibilities given us by Congress and the changing nature of wildlife violations, we need to step up our investigative and law enforcement efforts. This new structure and certain administrative changes will provide more flexibility and eliminate cumbersome procedures that, to some extent, have hampered the coordination of law enforcement efforts in the past."

Greenwalt emphasized that the new organizational changes also will strengthen the Bureau's cooperative efforts with the States, and increase its capabilities in protecting waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Under the old structure, Special Agents were assigned to specific sites in each State within the Fish and Wildlife Service's six regions. This resulted in jurisdictional and administrative problems that often delayed responses to law enforcement matters.

Under the new structure, the six regions have been divided into 13 Districts, each managed by a Special Agent-in-Charge. Based on geographical and functional considerations, several field offices will be located

in each District to give the Special Agent-in-Charge a modest strike force capability in responding to the District's investigative and law enforcement needs.

In the last few years, the public's increasing recognition of the need to protect all wildlife, not just the hunted species, has resulted in new legislation and amendments to existing laws that provide both broader protection and increased restrictions on the taking, transportation, sale, import, and export of wildlife.

In 1972 Congress enacted legislation to regulate the hunting of wildlife from aircraft (amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956) and to protect marine mammals (Marine Mammal Protection Act). The Endangered Species Act of 1973 regulates in the United States the import and export of those species declared by the Secretary of the Interior to be endangered or threatened. This Act also prohibits the interstate commerce of endangered wildlife.

Last year, the Government negotiated a treaty with 80 other countries to add further protection to endangered and threatened wildlife. When this treaty is implemented, both imports and exports of all fish and wildlife will be controlled.

Proposed regulations now being considered would also severely restrict the importation of foreign wildlife thought to be potentially dangerous to man or the environment.

One unfortunate aberration of the renewed public interest in the environment has been a greater demand for endangered species and an increase in the use of their parts in jewelry, furs, wearing apparel, and curios. The value of some rare species has skyrocketed. Leopard skin coats, now prohibited from importation, sell for as much as \$30,000. The mottled brown shell of the endangered hawksbill sea turtle is sold as tortoise shell and is frequently used in expensive jewelry, combs, and mirrors. Carved ivory (scrimshaw) made from the walrus, whale, and other animals is used in figurines, hair pieces, pins, and various curios. Skins feathers, and other parts of animals are also used in making hundred of items, some of which are sold to tourists abroad who are unaware they are buying contraband. Similar items find their way to department stores, jewelry stores, antique shops, and many other commercial outlets in the country.

The demand for these items has been so great that it has generated a new breed of wildlife violator and new kinds of wildlife violations radically different from what they typically were in the past. Instead of a hunter, the violator is often a seemingly reputable importer, businessman, or corporation, and with increasing frequency the crimes investigated involve large numbers of individuals who are often involved in intricate, well-planned operations.

The modern violator is often quite sophisticated and especially mobile. He can fly across the country, illegally bag an animal, and be back home with his trophy the next day. Recently, several rings of "trophy hunters" were investigated and prosecuted in the Far West where unscrupulous guides and taxidermists were employed by those willing to pay up to \$10,000 for rare bighorn sheep trophies. Deer and alligator poachers, encouraged by high black market prices, can kill and transfer animals or hides across State lines in a matter of hours.

Last year in New York City, a fur investigation involving foreign commerce transactions were completed when over 60,000 documents was obtained by search warrants and grand jury subpoena. It took thousands of man-hours for Special Agents of the Fish and Wildlife Service to assimilate the data and match the various transactions in order to substantiate the violations. Also last year, a prominent wild animal dealer who frequently did business with zoos throughout the world was sentenced to a year in jail for falsifying records in an attempt to import 20 live cheetahs.

In more and more cases, these wildlife profiteers are conspiring with others in elaborate schemes. With increasing frequency their violations transcend State and national boundaries and often those of foreign countries. Contacts with embassies, foreign governments, and agencies such as Interpol are necessary and are now occurring with greater frequency.

Investigations of this scope and magnitude require techniques and skills not commonly used in the past. These new developments pointed the way for the redirection and intensification of the Nation's wildlife law enforcement program. In the last year, the support staff of the Division of Law Enforcement has also been restructured and supplemented to include personnel with legal backgrounds and with experience in criminal investigation, public administration, criminology, and police science. The staff includes former FBI agents, Treasury agents, and military investigators. This backup support has been augmented by increased training and better equipment for agents in the field.

"The historical role of our wildlife law enforcement efforts has changed," Greenwalt said. "The present restructuring is a major step in developing the kind of sophisticated and professional law enforcement program we need to meet the challenges of today's wildlife problems."

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